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ABSTRACT

Suggestions from the National Distinguished Principals of 1989 are presented in this newsletter. This issue includes a description of techniques related to staff involvement and morale, school safety, public relations, time management, student interest, and vandalism. (LMI)

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HERE'S HOW

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Tips from NDPs

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Developed by 1989's
National Distinguished Principals

Lunch at the Ritz—Here's a striking way of encouraging students to display good table manners in the school lunchroom.

Every six to eight weeks, a certain group of students from each classroom—youngsters who have been selected by teachers for displaying exemplary behavior at the table—receive in the mail a formal invitation to join the principal for "Lunch at the Ritz."

For the occasion a special table is set up in the school lunchroom. There's a tablecloth and linen napkins, place cards, a full complement of knives and forks and spoons properly arranged at each student's place, candles, classical background music, waiters and waitresses (teacher volunteers, actually) to take the guests' orders, and an elaborate special desert.

The impact of this exercise on the students—guests and spectators alike—is reported to be "astounding."

Despooking Halloween—Parents are getting increasingly concerned about their children's safety and welfare on Halloween night—being out on dark streets, knocking on the doors of strangers, running the risk of being given a doctored "treat," etc. Schools in some districts are addressing these apprehensions by taking the occasion to make the evening of October 31 a "family fun night." Everyone in the family, from grandparents on down, is invited to come—preferably in costume. There are games and prizes and contests, awards for the best costumes, and maybe such old-time diversions as taffy pulls (grandparents can supervise *this* activity) and bobbing for apples.

The result is not only a safe, joyful observation of Halloween but a lot of fun and a good way of getting parents involved with the school.

"Positives" Box—It's a wooden box with a slot on the top. The box is located in the teacher's lounge and serves as a depository for "positives" the teachers jot down about students or colleagues. The principal, in turn, writes a positive note to the designated students and teachers.

Three Good Ways to Involve Staff: 1) Hold faculty meetings in classrooms—a different classroom for each meeting, with a different faculty member serving as host or hostess to introduce the program and arrange for such light refreshments as cookies and iced tea. This arrangement tends to build staff cohesiveness and gives staff members an opportunity to take a leadership role and also to become more familiar with each other's classrooms.

2) When you invite guest experts to speak at faculty meetings, ask members of the staff to perform the introduction. It's a useful way of recognizing outstanding members of the staff, developing leadership skills, and building closer staff/administration relations.

3) At each staff meeting have a member of the faculty give a 5- to 10-minute report on an item of current research or a on a recently published professional article. This assignment should of course be rotated and will not only help keep all hands abreast of important advances in the profession but put different teachers in the spotlight.

"Decorator" Restrooms—The goal is to ensure neat, vandalism-free restrooms, and the technique is to replace a cold, institutional atmosphere with the feeling of being in a bathroom at home.

A few inexpensively framed prints can work wonders. Small pink-and-white sachets and prints of white kit-

Note: These suggestions were randomly selected from tips that the 60 current NDPs shared with their fellow award-winners in Washington, D.C., on October 18, 1989.

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tens framed in pink will turn any girls' bathroom into a cheerful and clean place. Prints of Lamborghini automobiles, framed in black and gold, can just about eliminate the mess so common to the boys' room. And with some thought, the staff can probably think of some other nice touches, too.

In that connection, the decorator bathroom idea also works with teachers. Restrooms decked out with framed prints and such touches of home as dried flower arrangements can produce a homier, more attractive atmosphere.

Remembering School—Here's a way to give students a sense of perspective and also provide them (and their parents) with a nice memento.

Each May have the youngest students draw pictures and older students write several sentences describing "What I remember most about school this year." When students move on at the end of their elementary school experience, return to each student a collection of his or her annual statements. Kids are always amazed by what they thought was important each year and by how much their thinking and writing have improved. And their parents are thrilled to have this little trip down memory lane.

Emergency Information—If you had to summon emergency medical help for one of your teachers or staff members, would you be able to supply the paramedics with basic information about blood type and medications and allergies and the like? Do you have a confidential file of these facts, plus the names and telephone numbers of family and other people who should be notified?

It takes only a few minutes for each employee to complete a one-page form providing this information—a few minutes that could mean the difference between life and death.

School Ombudsmen—Parents sometimes are reluctant to go directly to the "Big Cheese" (you) to ask questions or discuss problems concerning the school. They will be more likely to open up, however, if they can talk with a friendly member of the staff, an ombudsman/woman, on a confidential basis. Select several level-headed, patient members of the staff to fill this role and describe their function in the school manual. Give names and telephone numbers and invite inquiries. In time maybe your ombudsmen could expand their role to handle inquiries from students, too.

School "Welcome Wagon"—This project is patterned after the national Welcome Wagon and consists of two packages distributed just before the start of school to the family of each new student. One package is for parents and is assembled by the PTA. The other is for students and is put together by the staff.

The first "package" is a folder that includes a welcoming letter from the principal and such information as the name and title of key school officials; names of all teachers and staff members; instructions on how to get specific information about the school; names and telephone numbers of key people: scheduled school activities and scheduled holidays; a statement of the school's philosophy and goals; school rules and procedures; curriculum overviews for each grade; lunch menu and free lunch information; and whatever else a parent might appreciate knowing.

The "package" for students consists of a number of coupons plus information about school rules, facilities, and services. Each coupon bears the name and room number of a special staff person the student will need to know: the librarian, school secretary, nurse, custodian, and principal, for example. When the student presents the coupon to the right person, the student receives a small gift.

Sports Geography—Just about every day, it seems, the newspapers run a story about how ignorant today's youngsters are about their own nation's geography.

A good source of help to deal with this situation is to be found in what might seem an unlikely source of enlightenment—the various professional sports leagues. Here's the idea:

For lots of kids the greatest heroes of all time play on the local basketball, football, or baseball team (for example, the Cleveland Cavaliers, the Atlanta Hawks, the Utah Jazz).

During the basketball (or whatever) season, designate one day each week for spending 10 or 15 minutes learning about the city and/or state of a rival team that is about to tangle with the local heroes. Teachers can present short geography lessons, tailored to the various grade levels, in which they not only fix the city and state's geographical location on the map but highlight some background facts—information readily available from an encyclopedia or by calling the guest city's Chamber of Commerce.

Another Geography Tip—Form a small group of parent volunteers to set up and manage an "Around the World" bulletin board that features a different country each month.

The basic feature of the bulletin board is a map of the world with the featured country outlined in yarn. Students and staff are invited to tack up items bearing on the current month's country. The typical result is an outpouring of family vacation photos and postcards, clippings from foreign newspapers and magazines, stamps, coins, and souvenirs—an array of excellent material for a colorful display.

Early Drop-offs—An increasing number of elementary and middle school students, including some very young ones, are home alone before school starts because their parents must leave for work. A good solution for these "latchkey" children is to invite their parents to drop them off early at school, where the principal (or school volunteers) can gather them into a group (or groups) and read aloud to them.

Not only does this provide the children with a safe haven, but it also gives them a good start on learning and demonstrates to both students and parents the importance you attach to reading.

And Still More Geography—Here's an enjoyable way of making youngsters a bit more familiar with local and regional geography. Stage a balloon release day out on the playground. Have each student set free a balloon carrying a personal note asking whoever finds the balloon to write back.

Meanwhile, arrange to have a large map of the United States displayed in a prominent place in the main hall. Before school begins each day hold a brief ceremony at which the names and lo-

cation of finders are pinpointed on the map. Chances are that letters will come from as close as a few blocks from the school to as far away as 600, 700, or even 1,000 miles.

Royal Readers—To underscore the importance of reading, have the students invite a prominent local personality such as the mayor, a leading business person, or the anchor of a TV news program, to be a "Royal Reader." That person then comes to the school and reads to the children from a book the Royal Reader particularly enjoyed when she or he was in elementary or middle school.

When the visitors arrive at school, they should be ceremoniously presented with a crown the children have made; they should later receive a photograph of themselves as a crowned "Royal Reader."

Not only do adults enjoy being invited in as a "Royal Reader," but the event may now and then generate good publicity for the school.

What's in a Name?—Clearly, a catchy name can mean a lot to a project's chances for success.

Consider, for example, the PANDA award (for Perfect-Attendance-No-Days-Absent). The principal presents a stuffed panda doll to classes in which all students and the teacher have been present or accounted for every day and in which there were no more than two tardies. Two pandas can be exchanged for a free ice cream party for the entire class. Attendance improves markedly.

Also well-named is a program for students who turn in money they have found in the school or on the grounds. Each receives an "Honest Abe" certificate. If the money is not claimed within three school days, the finder keeps it. Meanwhile the student can trade in the "Honest Abe" certificate for a free hamburger at one or another local participating fast-food outlet.

Newsletter News—Send a copy of your newsletter to your local newspapers. But be sure to pin a note to the top giving your name and telephone number and inviting a telephone call if a particular item piques a reporter's interest. Local newspapers *love* to print the names of local people: the names of kids on your "good citizen" list or the faculty committee taking on a new planning assignment.

This is a quick and easy way to publicize your school. Who knows—maybe something will catch a reporter's eye and lead to a full-blown feature story!

Reducing Interruptions—Such procedures as the daily attendance record and the lunch count are of course necessary, but it *isn't* necessary to have them interrupt classwork. Instead of asking individual students to deliver this information to the central office, have the teachers place such reports on spring-loaded clip boards mounted on the wall near their classroom door, ready for collection at a particular time each day. En route back to the office the collector can arrange these reports in the order most helpful to whoever processes them.

Staff Development Room—Surely there's a not-very-big space somewhere in your building that is free for just taking over. Do it and turn it into a "staff development room." Make it the repository for all professional books and magazines the school receives. Put in a VCR for viewing inservice tapes and similar materials; add an audio tape recorder for those kinds of materials. Wall space can be given over to professional posters, notices, clippings, book reviews, etc. It's a handy meeting place for grade-level teams and Effective Schools sessions. All in all, a stimulating, instructive place for faculty.

Martyr Day—Get everyone together (teachers, assistants, secretaries, librarians, area specialists, counselors, etc.)and ask them to pick a date for this year's "Martyr Day." Then have them draw names out of a hat. These are people with whom they will exchange jobs on "Martyr Day." The idea is to help the faculty and staff avoid feeling like martyrs about their regular assignments!

Greetings Bags—Here's an effective way of calling favorable attention to your school: First, contact the manager of a local grocery store and arrange to get as many paper bags as you have children participating in the project, with a few extras for "just in case."

Then have the children draw colorful, decorative greetings on the bag: "Have a nice day!" "Happy Thanksgiving" "Have a Safe Summer" and so on. Have have them add the name of the school and *their* names and grades, and returns the bags to the grocery, where they will delight customers.

Thought/Riddle for the Day—Spice up morning announcements with thoughts or riddles submitted by your students. Have the thought or riddle posted in a regular spot on a bulletin board. Have the librarian screen entries, as well as direct children to good sources.

Big and Little Brothers and Sisters—This is especially good in a Pre-K-8 school. Assign a Big Brother or Sister to each new first grader. Have the older child take a picture of his or her Little Brother/Sister and write a one-page biography to go with the picture for a special Back-to-School bulletin board feature.

Summer Staff Stuff—Attached to the staff's summer checks is a special newsletter that includes items to help staff members stay in touch over the summer and help build a feeling of togetherness: special projects, travel plans, anniversaries, and birthdays, information that staff members themselves contribute (they make their own judgments about their privacy). The newsletter should also contain information about school improvements, staff changes, redecoration, etc.

Special Friend Day—With families so spread out around the country, have a Special Friend Day (instead of Grandparents Day, for example) and let kids invite favorite bus drivers, neighbors, store clerks, or other special friends to visit the school as the kids' own personal guests.

"Good-bye" Kit—If a student has to voluntarily withdraw from school (the family moves away, for example), present him or her with a folder containing your personal expression of "best wishes," another from the student council president (if you have one), plus a stamped envelope with your name and the full mailing address of the school in order to encourage the child to keep in touch—at least once.

Who Owns *Here's How*?

So many authors have asked that question that I'd like to share the answer with everyone, authors and readers alike.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals owns the *title* of this newsletter: *Here's How*. No one can publish and circulate another newsletter with that title without being challenged by NAESP. But the *article* featured in each issue of *Here's How* is another matter.

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The original author/owner can arbitrarily decide to give or withhold permission, charge a fee or let it go for nothing, and explain or not explain why. For our part, we just want to be sure that our author's position has been respected.

Ours is a straightforward policy. As a professional, nonprofit association, NAESP wants to be sure that its communication efforts protect both the profession *and* the people in it, as well as provide for the widest possible dissemination of the ideas they generate.

Everything written here applies equally to our companion newsletter, *Streamlined Seminar*, which also publishes contributed material. I hope this has been helpful.

—Theodore O. Cron, NAESP Associate Executive Director for Communications

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